

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 10, 2009

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to express our opposition to the inclusion of the North Atlantic Planning Area in the draft proposed five-year Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) oil and gas leasing program that was issued by the Bush Administration and which is currently under review by the Department of Interior (DOI). We believe that any oil and gas leasing or related activities in the North Atlantic Planning Area would have a deleterious effect on key aspects of the New England economy such as tourism and fishing as well as on sensitive marine habitats such as Georges Bank.

The draft OCS leasing plan issued by the Bush Administration on January 16, 2009, proposes to hold a lease sale in the North Atlantic Planning Area in 2013. This massive planning area includes all federal submerged lands off the coasts of Massachusetts and New England. We applaud your decision to extend the comment period in order to give this draft proposal proper review.

Conducting oil and gas leasing in the North Atlantic Planning area would threaten the region's tourism and fishing industries. Tourism generated roughly \$16 billion for the Massachusetts economy in 2007 and supports nearly 130,000 jobs in the state. Allowing oil and gas drilling off the coasts of Massachusetts would endanger this key aspect of the state's economy.

In addition, oil and gas leasing would further imperil the already fragile marine ecosystem of Georges Bank. Georges Bank is the heart of the New England fishery and a key economic engine for the region. The Massachusetts fishery landings are valued at approximately \$350 million annually and Georges Bank is a key habitat for the region's marine life. The House of Representatives has already voted in overwhelming, bipartisan fashion to provide permanent protection for Georges Bank when it adopted H.R. 6899 on September 16, 2008. The Georges Bank Preservation Act, which includes language identical to that passed by the House, has been reintroduced in the House and Senate in this Congress.

While there are certainly offshore areas where oil and gas leasing is appropriate, more than 80 percent of the offshore oil and gas resources are located in areas that were already available to leasing prior to the expiration of the Congressional moratoria in 2008. Moreover, oil and gas companies are currently not producing on roughly three-quarters of the offshore leases that they already hold. The Department should continue its ongoing efforts to encourage companies to diligently develop the leases they already hold

before considering opening sensitive new areas off the coast of Massachusetts and New England. We therefore strongly urge you to remove the North Atlantic Planning Area from inclusion in the proposed five-year oil and gas leasing plan.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
U.S. House of Representatives



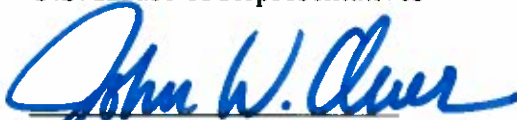
John F. Kerry
U.S. Senate



Barney Frank
U.S. House of Representatives



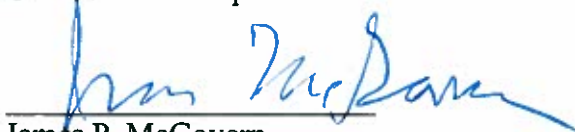
Richard E. Neal
U.S. House of Representatives



John W. Olver
U.S. House of Representatives



William D. Delahunt
U.S. House of Representatives



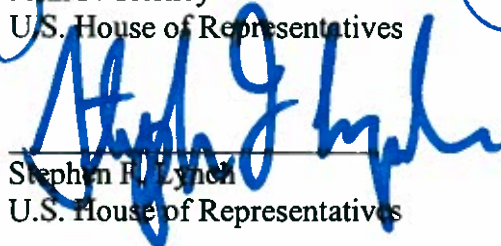
James P. McGovern
U.S. House of Representatives



John F. Tierney
U.S. House of Representatives



Michael E. Capuano
U.S. House of Representatives



Stephen F. Lynch
U.S. House of Representatives



Niki Tsongas
U.S. House of Representatives